

Weekly Bulletin

STATE BOARD OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Entered as second-class matter February 21, 1922, at the post office at Sacramento, California, under the Act of August 24, 1912 Acceptance for mailing at special rate of postage provided for in Section 1103, Act of October 3, 1917.

Vol. XI, No. 26

July 30, 1932

GUY P. JONES

Health of School Child Comes First

In a letter to the local board of education, Dr. Allen F. Gillihan, Health Officer of San Luis Obispo County, has set forth the reasons why health development work in the public schools constitutes an essential factor in modern education. Because of its importance at the present time and because of Dr. Gillihan's comprehensive statement of the facts, his letter is reproduced here:

San Luis Obispo City Board of Education, Senior High School,

San Luis Obispo, California.

Gentlemen: It has just been brought to my attention that you are considering the discontinuance of the Health Development work in the city schools of San Luis Obispo, and, as your health officer, I am addressing you in order to calmly lay before you the vital importance of such work in modern education.

The work in education of the past few centuries has well proven that a child can neither grasp nor retain instruction unless he is in normal condition; that is, unless his brain is able to function naturally. If he is sick or his bodily mechanism is not operating properly he can not study with benefit to himself, and there is no use to try to make him. It would be equally foolish to use the modern high-pressure expensive methods of education on an undernourished child as it would be to punish him for inattention. Such efforts would be as futile as an attempt to fill a reservoir when the water escaped through leaks almost as quickly as the high-pressure engineering method endeavored to fill it.

By the State school law, school budgets must be based upon the average daily attendance of the previous year. It would seem only reasonable in order to keep attendance up to the mark that very close attention be given to reducing the number of absentees and repeaters as much as possible. Cursory examination into causes of absentees from school, and repeaters in school work, would show that sickness is the most frequent actual cause, as well as a most threadbare excuse; so naturally endeavor should be made to keep sickness down. Modern higher technical education provides for the training of public health nurses, and the State Department of Education tests the training and ability of each applicant before allowing her to do health and development work in the schools. Although it may at times be difficult to secure a suitable nurse, still there is no lack of competent workers in this field.

Your department must now have available records of the city schools for a number of years. If you will have a tabulation made from these records showing the proportion of absentees each year, your work would quickly show the value of such a nurse in keeping up the average daily attendance on which to calculate the budget for the next year. Modern school administrative practice requires that each large school should be able to show, by years, the proportion of absentees, and the reason for such absentees; the number of repeaters, with the real reasons for pupils having to repeat a year's course; also the proportion of physical defectives, and the proportion of these defectives which have been corrected. The effect of a defect upon the mental capacity of the children, and many other studies of importance should be made. Exactly as in the modern factory intensive study would be made to ascertain why production rate was declining, with the object of eliminating the conditions which cause a depression in their business. I can but point out that your Board in one sense is in business, the business of preparing the growing generation for its place in the world; surely you, as business men, want your business to be successful in its way as the successful manufacturer could be in his.

If a study of your city school record fails to disclose any value in the health and development work which has been carried on here for some ten years or more, please do not jump to the conclusion that the work itself is not worth the money spent on it. Thirty years' familiarity with the results of school health work, not only in this State but also throughout the United States in general, as well as in foreign countries, has fully convinced me of the great value of such work.

On January 1, 1908, it became the duty of all educating authorities in England and Wales to provide for medical inspection of all children entering schools. The twenty-four years which have since elapsed have served to permanently establish such work in the elementary school system of that territory.

If your records do not show the results, possibly the investigator might not have been sufficiently familiar with the method of modern statistical study to unearth this information; or maybe the records themselves are incomplete or defective; maybe those having authority over the work had so occupied the attention of the field nurse with nonessentials that she was unable to do real health and development work among those school children under her care; or possibly the personality of the field worker, although having trained and passed the State requirements, may not have been adapted to such work, and little or nothing was accomplished; and lastly, possibly it was felt that the business was too small to warrant such studies, or budgets did not provide the necessary help to make such studies, and none have been made.

The work of public health nurses should at all times be supervised and directed by a person having training, experience and knowledge of relative values in public health; the results of the nurse's work should be evaluated by the same standards. To digress a minute, it would not be by showing that a nurse had been busy all the time that she was competent, or that, by the end of the year, she had compiled elaborate tables showing that, under her charge of say 1000 school children, she had found so many absentees, had

so many repeaters, had found so many with defective or neglected teeth, enlarged tonsils, flat feet, or undernourishment. But if she had been able to reduce absences from school materially, had been able to secure glasses for children whom she found had defective vision, or had been able to secure the cooperation of the parents in building up a child's undernourishment, or had succeeded in having them correct the defective teeth situation, she would be able to demonstrate her worth to the school system. Even one child whose defects have been overcome and who develops into a normal, healthy, robust adult is worth many reams of records of defects about which nothing ever is done except to make more records. Our own parents were far more successful in rearing normal, healthy adults, otherwise the results of the examinations at the time of the draft in the United States for the World War would not have shown that one young man out of every five examined was turned down because some defect was found which probably would have prevented him from standing the strain of warfare.

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The financial depression that is now sweeping the country has resulted in much unemployment. That this will result in undernourishment of younger school children is but natural. Undernourishment in young school children means poor school work and many repeaters at the end of the school term. This wastage of much money could have been saved by searching out and correcting undernourishment tendencies at its very beginning. In some parts of the United States school nursing service has been discontinued after having been established for several years, and even at this early date the folly of such action has been demonstrated. In the June "Survey" an article by John K. and Margaret A. Norton on "What is Happening in the Schools" says:

"In the State of Washington many counties have given up their school nursing service. That this is a dangerous economy was shown by the increased sickness among school children."

Undoubtedly it has occurred to you before this that the whole of this work is really preventive medicine and, as such, should be included in the activities of the local health department. But in this State the school law places this matter squarely on the shoulders of the local school boards, and it is up to them to have this work done or take the responsibility of having done nothing. For another reason the activities of the health office cover the entire county; if we undertook health and development work in one section of the county we would be compelled to undertake it in every section, rural as well as city.

With only one nurse in the city schools of San Luis Obispo, the largest school center in the county, we have never felt that we were able to do all we would have liked to in the "health of the child," even when we cooperated to the full with the school nurse, and had her full cooperation.

After the schools open next term, in the event that there is no accredited nurse in the schools of this city in whom I can place confidence, it will be imperative for this health department to retain under its own control the issuing of official permits to return to school of children or teachers who have been absent from school for two days or longer, as required by the regulations of the State Department of Public Health. This will increase absences and tardiness because the absentees will be compelled to report to the health office, be examined, and receive a permit, free of charge, before attempting to return to school again.

Where there is a State regulation, as in this State, controlling this matter, it would be very poor policy for school authorities not to observe it. In the event of an epidemic being introduced into a school and it should be found that the school authorities had neglected to protect themselves under the State regulation, the responsibility would be theirs. It would not be very comfortable to consider should such an unfortunate condition arise. Such a matter is of graver importance in a large school of many hundred children than it would be in a small rural school of ten to fifteen pupils.

A child may have remained home with a mild attack of some epidemic disease, the health department knowing nothing of it because no physician was consulted, and the parents had not reported the disease to the health department. The child may return to school while still capable of spreading the infection, and spread the disease among his classmates, some of whom may die. Deaths from a communicable disease or even cases of such diseases occurring in school will immediately cause a number of parents to keep their children home.

The efficient and well-trained school nurse, by requiring that every absentee from school must pass through her hands before being allowed to return to school, can effectually block such an outbreak. Furthermore, she could find a child with defective vision, secure glasses for him and feel satisfied when she ascertains that his school work promptly improves and the threatened unsatisfactory school work prevented, and school money saved from having to be spent on repeating a year's work. Undernourishment could be discovered at its very onset, the cause searched out and corrected. But your generous time will not be consumed further. In all sincerity I must

say that it is not in a spirit of antagonism that I am warning your Board of this unwise and dangerous economy of discontinuing your health and development work, but entirely from an honest desire to help you.

This is a small health department and our time is fully occupied. Health of school children is but one of many important health activities. If we are called upon to devote much time to this activity we can do so only by robbing time from some other activity. However, we stand at all times willing to give our wholehearted cooperation.

Very sincerely,

ALLEN F. GILLIHAN, M.D. County Health Officer.

THE LONG VIEW OF PREVENTIVE MEDICINE

Dr. E. H. Cary, president-elect of the American Medical Association, in his address before the Iowa State White House Conference in April, said many significant things. Here are a few highlights from his address:

"We are beginning more and more to sense the fact that future civilization lies with the proper development of the child. Childhood has never had in all the years gone by such fortunate opportunities for health and happiness. Every facility is offered for a more perfect development of our children in this era. It lies within the province of the medical profession to direct the family and child so that cooperation will be the result. In recognition of the opportunities for education of the family, the pediatrician should have the encouragement of the profession. Man is but a grownup child; health standards and increased efficiency are more likely to be obtained if we are permitted to direct the health of the child.

We must recognize that each individual must, if possible, become a self-sustained unit. His physical defects must be eliminated, and if his nervous system is normal, his capacity for self-support, comfort and happiness should be realized.

The principle that one is born free is generally accepted. Every child, however, has an individuality which should be observed and guided and its dominant qualities developed, with the hope that the State will prosper when there are fewer square pegs in round holes. * * * We doctors believe in prevention of disease; in prevention of accidents; in prevention of losses from every cause * * *.

Preventive medicine concerned with the growth and development of childhood discloses information which can be made to bring into being the well-born child, to further see to it that he thrives lustily with-

out halt during infancy; that he develops physically, mentally and socially, acquiring a sound education with which he can pass through adolescence into a more secure maturity * * *.

We must guard the normal growth of the mind and body of the children of our land. As the future of our country is interwoven in this great bundle of life, we should more and more help direct the destiny of this fair land.

Our knowledge is increasing; our desire to help is evident. From meetings of this character a new spirit of conquest is born."

MORBIDITY*

Diphtheria.

54 cases of diphtheria have been reported. Those communities reporting 10 or more cases are as follows: Los Angeles 29.

Measles.

65 cases of measles have been reported. Those communities reporting 10 or more cases are as follows: Los Angeles 21, Stockton 15.

Scarlet Fever.

44 cases of scarlet fever have been reported. Those communities reporting 10 or more cases are as Tollows: Los Angeles 14.

Whooping Cough.

294 cases of whooping cough have been reported. Those communities reporting 10 or more cases are as follows: Oakland 20, Los Angeles County 23, Long Beach 10, Los Angeles 96, Pasadena 15, Santa Monica 20, San Francisco 16, Stockton 13.

Smallpox.

9 cases of smallpox have been reported, as follows: Los Angeles County 1, Glendale 3, Los Angeles 1, Hawthorne 2, San Bernardino County 1, Santa Clara County 1.

Typhoid Fever.

15 cases of typhoid fever have been reported, as follows: Contra Costa County 1, Pittsburg 1, Fresno County 1, Los Angeles County 2, Long Beach 1, Los Angeles 3, Newport Beach 1, Placer County 1, San Bernardino County 1, Sonoma County 1, Red Bluff 1, California 1.**

Meningitis (Epidemic).

2 cases of epidemic meningitis have been reported, as follows: Oakland 1, Fullerton 1.

* From reports received on July 25th and 26th for week ending July 23d.

** Cases charged to "California" represent patients ill before entering the State or those who contracted their illness traveling about the State throughout the incubation period of the disease. These cases are not chargeable to any one locality.

Poliomyelitis.

4 cases of poliomyelitis have been reported, as follows: Whittier 1, San Bernardino County 1, San Francisco 1, Visalia 1.

Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever.

2 cases of Rocky Mountain spotted fever have been reported, as follows: Modoc County 1, Fort Bidwell 1.

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Trichinosis

1 case of trichinosis from San Francisco has been reported.

Food Poisoning.

11 cases of food poisoning from San Bruno have been reported.

Undulant Fever.

5 cases of undulant fever have been reported, as follows: Kern County 1, San Bernardino County 2, San Francisco 1, Etna 1.

Septic Sore Throat.

1 case of septic sore throat from Berkeley has been reported.

The most important single agent engaged in medical work is the competent and conscientious family medical practitioner.—Sir Arthur Newsholme.

Health is worth whatever expenditure is efficiently incurred in its maintenance or to assure its return. —Sir Arthur Newsholme.

Something of the lack of adjustment of the average man to rapidly changing social, economic, and political conditions of our complicated modern civilization may be reflected in a certain temporary maladjustment between curative medicine and preventive medicine, which should stand in harmonious relations.—William H. Welch, M.D.

We can not have the sort of country we ought to have unless we have the sort of communities that should exist to make it up. A community is not a mere assemblage of persons unrelated to each other, but a body of persons that have the sort of community of interests which can be served only by a community opinion, only by thorough knowledge, only by cooperative effort, and, most of all, only by community of purpose.—Woodrow Wilson.

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